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ABSTRACT

A teacher has found a historical study of a newspaper's doublespeak to be consistently effective when it is used in an American studies classroom as a teaching model. As the Ku Klux Klan evolved in the 1920s, so did the Pekin, Illinois, "Daily Times's" deceptive coverage of the Klan. Doublespeak in news reports and editorials was used to deceive readers; doublespeak distorted events, hid purposes, and evaded results. During the first year (1922) of the Klan's ownership of the "Daily Times," the paper used euphemism, jargon and gobbledygook to exaggerate the Klan's popularity and to mislead the community about the Klan's legitimacy and authority. In January 1924, the paper's doublespeak took a new turn. In a series of columns published on the editorial page under the banner of "Klan Komments," several Klan beliefs were announced. The paper used doublespeak in its reporting of the murder trial of D. C. Stephenson, a former Klan leader. The Klan sold the newspaper a few months after the Stephenson case. During the time the Klan owned the paper, censorship was used to omit some reports of Klan-related events. Doublespeak made the Klan's opposition to immigrants, strikes, and bootleggers look legitimate and popular. Doublespeak made the Klan leaders represent order and authority. But even doublespeak did not work in late 1925. When the Klan sold the paper in 1926, however, it still looked like a newspaper. (RS)

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THE DOUBLESPEAKING "TIMES" OF THE KLAN IN THE TWENTIES

Jim Fulcher

This historical study of a newspaper's doublespeak is one that I have found to be consistently effective when I use it in my American Studies classroom as a teaching model.

On several days in January of 1924, Pekin's "Daily Times" printed a column entitled "Klan Koments." These columns were neither the first nor the last reference to the Klan in that newspaper. Indeed, as the Klan evolved in the 1920s, so did the newspaper's deceptive coverage of the Klan. Doublespeak in news reports and editorials consisted in the use of euphemisms, jargon, and gobbledygook to deceive readers; doublespeak distorted events, hid purposes, and evaded results. On the other hand, the doublespeak also reveals some truths as do the corpses hidden by a mass murderer in Milwaukee or in Atlanta.

Although doublespeak is considered a kind of language to avoid, it also reveals aspects of its users that they want to conceal. In Doublespeak, William Lutz mentions the basics of doublespeak. Doublespeak exists when someone uses a euphemism not to avoid offense but instead to deceive, when someone uses jargon not to convey specialized information within a group of people in a trade, interest group, or occupation but instead to deceive outsiders, when someone uses pretentious words or gobbledygook not to communicate intricate information but instead to deceive (New York: Harper and Row, 1989). In his Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doublespeak (New York: Crown Publishers, 1981)

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Hugh Rawson notes that instances of doubletalk resemble "isotopes" of the "conflicts, fears, and shames" of those who use it(1). In "Doublespeak and Ethics," George Bramer contends that the moral judgments about lying are like those about using doublespeak, i.e. in general, the use of doublespeak is immoral(in Beyond 1984, ed. William Lutz, Urbana,IL: NCTE, 1989, 65-74). In short, to find someone's deliberate deception about concerns, purposes, and values, trace the doublespeak.

Prior to the Klan's purchase of the newspaper in 1922, the paper was critical of the Klan. For instance, an editorial quoted part of a speech that introduced a resolution for a Congressional investigation of the Klan. A Congressman from Massachusetts, Peter Tague, argued that the Klan's "illegal claim of the right to punish individuals for alleged offenses violates the following articles of the constitution: the right to be secure against unlawful search and seizure, right of due process of law, public trial...." Tague also contended that a Klansman's oath put a Klansman in "involuntary servitude." The editorial ended with a quotation of Tague's conclusion, "There is no room for it in the U.S."(Sept. 26, 1921, p. 40. Two days later the paper printed a wire service report about several investigations of the Klan, especially "opposition from federal, state, and municipal goverments" (Sept. 28, 1921, p.1).

After the purchase of the paper by the Klan in October of 1922, the "Daily Times" coverage of the Klan changed. Less than a month after the purchase and under a headline of "Klan Posts Notices At An Early Hour," a brief article reported a local incident as follows:

> In the darkness of early morning today a half a dozen automobiles loaded with members of the K.K.K. entered the city of Peoria from the south. The men without speaking a word affixed notices about the square, threatening

> vengeance of the invisible Empire to all sellers and buyers of votes. Their work completed, the men left the city as silently as they had entered (Nov. 7, 1922, p. 4).

The double slant of "loaded with members" and the specialized group's terminology in the phrase,"vengeance of the invisible Empire," effectively put a silent menace between the lines of the news report. Considering the new ownership of the paper and that Pekin is south of Peoria, the article was both a news report and a public warning to the local citizens.

However, the paper still looked like a newspaper. For reports of non-local news, the paper still subscribed to a wire service, the International News Service. For instance, an INS report of a governors' conference was negative about the Klan. However, the locally constructed headlines gave a different impression. One of the headlines was "Annual Governors' Conference Will Make "Invisible Empire" Its Topic," and a subheadline was "Three Bitter Opponents" (Dec. 14, 1922, p. 1). Thus, the headlines provided publicity for the Klan and also implied that only three of the 48 governors were in opposition.

A month later, INS reported an event that was the subject of editorials and news reports across the country. Below the headline of "Tells of Terrible Crime That Blackened History of Louisiana and Startled the Entire World," an editorial note was printed. It said that the government "has thrown an army of federal agents into Louisiana to punish the perpetuators of the infamous mob murders" at Mer Rouge (Jan. 4, 1923, p. 1). That was the first time an editorial comment was printed below a headline and above a wire service report. The euphemistic language of "an army of federal agents" directed attention towards the notion of national government's intervention in small towns, and the euphemistic language of "mob murders" directed attention a way from the

the Klan. The word "mob" also led to an early paragraph in the report that identified the "hooded men" and noted that "there is no proof as yet that they acted upon orders of the Klan" (Jan. 4, 1923, p. 1). After the editorial introduction, the wire service text itself reported eye witness descriptions of the abduction of Walt Daniels, Thomas Richards, and three other men. The three were later released by the mob. The witness, who was one of the three, also described the flogging of the father of Walt Daniels while Walt Daniels was tied and forced to watch. Also reported were details about the scene where Daniels and Richards were beaten to death and also the secluded lake where their mutiliated bodies were dumped. The Mer Rouge murders never again made the front-page.

Three months later, on April 3, 1923, there was an editorial with the title of "An Ex-Slave's Will" (p.4). It used euphemistic language to claim that slaves "had the benefit of three generations of the industrial school of slavery and more or less close associations with the white families to which they belonged." In the same month, an editorial about "Immigration and Cheap Labor" was printed (April 24, 1923, p. 4). Again, euphemistic language was used to assert "a strong and growing sentiment in this country in favor not only of restricted but selected immigration" and "difficulties with our foreign groups opened the people's eyes." In addition, the editorial insisted that the American people were "interested in measures of self-protection from a hodge podge of unassimiliable foreign nationalities" who were "from the slums of European cities." Both editorials used doublespeak to elaborate value judgments and conceptions that became part of the newspaper reader's background information, information that built support for the Klan in the community, information that reinforced the Klan's image as an organization seeking to purify and reform American life.

In further support of the image of the Klan's interest in reform, the paper reported the Klan reforming itself. For example, "acting cashier of the Klan," E.J.Jones, "obtained the municipal court warrants charging Furney and McKinnon with larceny" (Furney was the national Klan's cashier and McKinnon was "head of the Klan espionage bureau")(April 4, 1923, p. 1) The use of legal terms without explanations of their meanings for ordinary readers in the 1920s, such as "municipal court warrants" and even "larceny," was the use of jargon. The jargon was doublespeak since it deceptively implied to the ordinary readers that the Klan obeyed laws and used legal procedures to improve its own organization. A few months later the same implications were in a news report about the firing of Grand Kleagle G. W. Keeling in Texas by Imperial Wizard H. W. Evans. Evans, it was reported, was working within the Klan's "present constitution" ("Kleagle Keeling Is Fired," June 27, 1923, p. 1). What made that report newsworthy and even worthy of the front-page in a small town in central Illinois was that the national leader was a "reformist," that the phrase "present constitution" sounded like a phrase in the American legal system, and that specialized terms of the Klan, such as "Imperial Wizard" and "Kleagle," were thus by usage associated with the terms of law. Thus, doublespeak was used to make the Klan sound not only legitimate but also authorized.

Further support of the Klan was implied by front-page stories about its local popularity. A major highway from downstate Illinois into Chicago was blocked "for more than two hours by a big Klan initiation and ceremony during the night....the traffic jam because of the initiation ceremonies is reported to have been very serious" ("Klan Initiation Holds Up Traffic," June 7, 1923, p.1). Another report that summer noted that "20,000 will participate" in "the greatest rally of the Ku Klux Klan ever held in Illinois." "A huge

street parade will be one of the features" during "a night spectacle at the Edgar county fairgrounds. It will be on July 28" ("Will Initiate One Thousand Klansmen," July 13, 1923, p. 1). In addition to the pretentious and pompus language, i.e. gobbledygook, and the possibly exaggerated figures, an interesting point was that this front-page "news report" of July 13 was also, in effect, a public invitation to the event that was to be held two weeks later.

During that first year of the Klan's ownership of Pekin's "Daily Times," the paper used euphemism, jargon, and gobbledygook to exaggerate the Klan's popularity and to mislead the community about the Klan's legitimacy and authority. In January of 1924, the paper's doublespeak took a new turn. In a series of columns published on the editorial page under a banner of "Klan Komments," several Klan beliefs were announced.

One of the columns asserted, "I hold no allegiance to any foreign government, or king, pope, or any other foreign, political, or religious power" ("A Klansman's Creed," Jan. 6, 1924, p.4). The statement was gobbledygook, and it was doublespeak in the sense that it was certainly one way to state the Klan's policy towards a priest, rabbi, or nun, let alone towards Leo Frank in Georgia. Another column stated,"The Times stands for Law Enforcement and does not wish to be misunderstood on that question. First of all, to make law enforcement effective, the decisions and rulings of our courts must be respected and obeyed...." The column about the position of the "Daily Times" went on to say, "We are not in favor of vigilance committee but be not stand (sic) in a passive way, that all will be well and let it go at that, that action is required of each of us to help make laws effective...."("Klan Komments," Jan. 7, 1924, p.4). That statement's gobbledygook is doublespeak. Although

it stated that the paper (and the Klan) respected and followed the law in the sense of being opposed to those breaking the Prohibition laws, the statement evaded the Klan's violations of other laws. Still another column pledged "I believe in the prevention of unwarranted strikes by foreign labor agitators. I believe in the limitation of foreign immigration. I am a native born American citizen and I believe my rights in this country are superior to those of foreignors" (Jan.8, 1924, p.4). The "prevention of unwarranted strikes" masked the Klan's use of violence to intimidate people who were in unions or on strike. The doublespeak about immigrants disguised the Klan's use of domestic terrorism against immigrants who wanted some of the factory jobs in the Midwest in general and around Pekin in particular.

Some of the "Klan Komments" were even in verse. The rhyme and meter were not the most serious problems in "Breathes of Patriotism," which ended with this:

Since the Ku Klux have come around
You will have to watch your step
If you don't they may look you up
For they sure have got the pep(Jan. 10, 1924, p.4).

And a lack of clear, direct language is not the most serious problem in the next day's verse, which ended as follows:

So now all true Americans
You should rise up to a man,
Make up your minds to fall in line,
And join the Ku Klux Klan ("The Bright Fiery Cross, Jan. 11, 1924,p.4).

During the week of Klan Komments, the paper also reported that near Marion, Illinois, another small town, there was "a second series of weekend raids" with "Klansmen headed by Federal prohibition agents," and "136 were arrested in a

county cleanup" ("Klansmen Aided Federal Agents," Jan.8, 1924, p. 5). The doublespeak distored the real events, making it sound as if the Klan was officially commanded by Federal agents and officially authorized by American law.

Along the same line but a few months later, a front-page story reported that during a Klan meeting in a church in nearby Peoria, people in a car drove past and "opened fire on the structure, shooting at random with rifles." The car came back, and this time used "vicious fire" from shotguns to attack. The third time the car drove past, with "occupants again firing madly," the Klansmen shot back. The car suddenly swerved "before the Kluxors could get down from their perch and reach the street to assist police in making a capture" ("One May Die As A Result of Attack On Klan Gathering," Jan. 28, 1924, p.1). As the Klansmen were "aided" by Federal agents in Marion, so the Klansmen "aided" the police in Peoria.

A few months after the Klan Komments and the aid and assistance of Peoria police and Federal agents in Marion, the headlines stressed how well the Klan was doing. In April, a news report about the conflict between the bootleggers and the Klan in southern Illinois was printed with a headline of "Ku Klux Klan Wins in Herrin Election" (April 16, 1924, p. 4); in May a front-page headline was "Ku Klux Klan Wins Political Battle in Indiana Primary" (May 7, 1924, p. 1).

1925 started as another good year for the Klan and Pekin's "Daily Times." The Klan "was growing by leaps and bounds in Illinois, following revelations of alleged betrayals on the part of Charles G. Palmer, Grand Dragon of Illinois." In addition, "G. Roy Wagner, Exalted Cyclops of the Peoria Klan, has also been removed from office," and "no more dues will be paid to the state organization

of which Palmer is the head" ("Peoria Klan Quits Palmer," Jan. 26, 1925, p.1). The Klan's reform of itself continued. In early 1925, the Klan's membership and reputation were at the highpoint.

In April, the case of D.C.Stephenson in Indiana became front-page news, even in Pekin's "Daily Times."

From the first report of the case through the last one, the paper used doublespeaking headlines to minimize, disguise, and undermine the wire service news about Stephenson. The front-page headline was "Girl, Assault Victim, Is Dead" (April 14, 1925, p. 1). However, Wyn C. Wade says Madge Oberholtzer was no girl; she was a 28 year old woman. He mentions that she was not only a victim of assault but also of rape. In addition, Wade quotes the dying woman's deposition, in which she said,"He chewed me all over my body, bit my neck and face, chewed my breasts until they bled..."(The Fiery Cross--Ku Klux Klan in America, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1987, 241). The first subheadline was "Death Comes From Alleged Attack of Former Klan Leader." Yet the news report of the wire service quotes the police arrest report that the attack did happen. Also, Wade explains Stephenson had resigned from a national Klan office (Imperial Klaliff) in order to make the Indiana Klan independent, but at the time of the attack was still running the Indiana Klan, was intending to run for the Senate in 1926, and was going to run for the Presidency in 1928 (Wade 240-5). The second subheadline stated, "Attack Supposed To Have Taken Place On Way To Indiana." However, the wire service report itself left no doubt about the fact that the attack was made on a train ride from Chicago to Indianapolis. The third subheadline said, "Stephenson Out On Bail," which seemed to diminish the seriousness of his situation. On the other hand, both Wade's The Fiery Cross and Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan

by David M. Chalmers (Durham: Duke University Press,1987) discuss the intense and immediate responses of Stephenson as soon as the train arrived in Indianapolis.

Two days after the first report, Pekin citizens read another front-page headline. It said, "Stephenson To Know Fate Today On Assault Charge: His Attorney Will Make An Effort to Quash All Indictments" (April 16, 1925,p.1). The words implied that the matter was almost inconsequential. On the other hand, both Wade and Chalmers give accounts of the desperate attempts to stop the indictments by the attorney, by every influential Indiana Klan leader Stephenson called, and by Stephenson himself, including Stephenson's own comment,"I am the Law in Indiana" (Wade 240-5,Chalmers 172). In October,a wire service report of the trial was given the headline in Pekin of "Miss Oberholtzer Points Finger From Grave As Court Allows Her Story of Affair With Ex-Klan Leader To Be Admitted As Evidence" (Oct. 3, 1925, p. 1). Wade, however, states that the two people only had a few dates, which hardly constitutes an affair. By November, Stephenson's name was not included in headlines; instead a headline stated "Defense in Indiana Murder Case Works on Suicide Theory" (Nov. 5, 1925, p. 1). On November 13,1925, the first headline was "Asks Death For Trio On Murder Trial," and the second was "Prosecutor Claims Trio Must Hang" (p.1). The last headline about the case repeated some terms of doublespeak: "Judge Will Pass Life Sentence on Ex-Dragon Today for Girl's Death" (Nov. 16, 1925, p. 1).

Even though the Stephenson case headlines included abundant doublespeak, the Klan sold Pekin's "Daily Times" a few months later. The paper had used doublespeak rather than censorship about the case. And the doublespeak collapsed under the weight of the facts of the case.

It is true that the paper might have used censorhip in the sense of simply not printing the wire service reports. During the time that the Klan owned the paper, censorship was used to omit some reports of Klan-related events. In the winter of 1922-3, New York's "World" published a series of articles criticizing the Klan, articles printed im may papers across the country, articles praised by notable journalists, including William Allen White and H. L. Mencken, articles not printed by Pekin's paper. The paper did not print syndicated editorials in 1923 about the conspicuous absence of arrest,trial, and sentence in connection with the infamous murders of Daniels and Richards by a "mob" in Louisiana. The paper did not print the many news reports from 1922 through the summer of 1926 about local community organizations that rose up against the country: the Dallas County Citizens League in Texas, the Knights of Liberty in New York, the Anti-Klan Association in Oklahoma,the Minute Men of the West in California. Nor did the paper report the failure of the national Klan march in Washington,D.C., in which fewer than half of the expected members attended. Nor did the paper report incidents in Indiana when police made arrests based on the files D. C. Stephenson released to them while he was in prison. Nor did the paper report that in late 1926 and in 1927, the Klan lost many elections. Nor did it report the nation-wide defections: membership of 4 million in 1924 but only 15,000 in 1930.

Yet the paper used doublespeak instead of simply ignoring the Stephenson news. Pekin's paper was in competition with other papers that were read by some of Pekin's residents, papers from Peoria, Bloomington, Chicago, and St. Louis. To compete, Pekin's paper,in spite of being owned by the Klan, continued to report other news, print advertisements, and provide other services common among newspapers of that time, including wire service reports. Another

factor was the precedent of the "mob" murders of Richards and Daniels. The Mer Rouge murders were a front-page story but not for long. When arrest, indictment, trial and sentencing did not happen in Louisiana, the front-page reports ceased. Perhaps in Pekin's newspaper office the initial hope was that the Indiana case would replay the Louisiana case. When it did not and when the wire service kept sending reports, the paper responded by increasing the amount of doublespeak. After all, from the time of the Klan's purchase in 1922, the use of euphemism, jargon, and gobbledygook to deceive had worked. Doublespeak made the Klan's opposition to immigrants, strikes, and bootleggers look legitimate and popular. Doublespeak made the Klan leaders represent order and authority. But even doublespeak did not work in late 1925. On the other hand, even in 1926 when the Klan sold the paper, Pekin's "Daily Times" still looked like a newspaper.

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